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# MX Basing Concept Assessed

## Results of Defense Science Board and Air Force evaluations given Defense secretary as he prepares to brief President

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Washington—Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger is preparing to brief President Ronald Reagan on the results of a Defense Science Board and U.S. Air Force assessment of the closely spaced basing concept for the MX intercontinental ballistic missile.

Weinberger received assessment details last week following analysis by the Defense Dept. and the Air Force. The assessment briefing included principal Pentagon deputies, service officials and Charles Townes, who headed the Defense Science Board study of closely spaced basing, also called Dense Pack.

### Initial Deployment

The Air Force position is to deploy MX in the closely spaced basing mode with an initial 100 ballistic missiles in an array of 100 super-hardened capsules in the southwestern U.S.

USAF officers conducting the briefing told Weinberger the initial operational capability date of 1986 could be met with this deployment plan.

The service is scheduled to provide the location to the Defense secretary in mid-October. It is expected to be on government-owned land on or adjacent to Nellis AFB, Nev.

In deploying 100 ballistic missiles in 100 capsules initially, USAF's plan would include options to react to any counter by the Soviet Union to overcome the closely spaced basing of the weapon.

This implies a vigorous research and development program to enable the deployment of additional super-hardened capsules and concealment by hiding the missiles among a larger number of capsules, probably one missile for each five shelters. It also would include the option for mobility so that missiles could be periodically moved.

The option for ballistic missile defense to protect the arrays of closely spaced based MX missiles would be a key alternative and would require accelerated development in this area of technology to enable transition to rapid deployment from development.

The Defense Dept. plans to increase Army funding beginning in Fiscal 1984 by approximately \$1.5 billion a year over the next five years to accelerate the effort to demonstrate an endoatmospheric non-nuclear kill system.

Part of the increased funding would be applied to completing full-scale development of the Sentry ballistic missile defense system, a low-altitude interceptor, to support the option for initial capability in 1991. Funding also would be applied towards a high endoatmospheric/low exoatmospheric defense for closely spaced basing of MX utilizing existing hardware wherever possible.

The essential element of the USAF plan presented to Weinberger is to begin MX deployment and observe cautiously Soviet reaction to Dense Pack and, preserving the options to expand, make the decision later on how rapidly to utilize the options.

Charles Townes told Weinberger the assessment showed that closely spaced basing can work against the existing Soviet land-based ballistic missile threat, according to officials at the meeting last week.

He said capsules with levels of hardness required to overcome accurate nuclear attacks can be built and deployed and that fratricide would be a problem for the Soviet Union.

Fratricide would be caused by nuclear warheads arriving on target and detonating to produce effects that would disable those that followed. The basing mode with hardened capsules in close proximity to one another—1,800 to 2,200 ft. apart—forces the warheads to arrive in close proximity, creating the fratricide effect.

"Townes agreed with the Air Force that the Soviets can't attack closely spaced basing with their current reentry vehicles on the SS-18 force, and he believes the basing plan will drive them toward significant changes in weapon systems in order to counter MX in this mode," a Defense Dept. official said.

### Townes Assessment

The Townes Panel assessment, however, differs from the USAF assessment in that it concludes that the USSR could "readily and early-on deploy counters to 100 missiles in 100 capsules, from a technological standpoint, in the 1987 to 1990 period," the official continued.

This could mean that the U.S. would have to proliferate capsule arrays and conceal missiles and deploy ballistic missile defense for the arrays.

USAF officers argued that the U.S. intelligence community estimates that the Soviets could not move to counter closely spaced MX basing until the mid-1990s, another official explained.

He said it was clear that Townes has little credibility in intelligence estimates, and believes that if the U.S. can capitalize on this technology, the Soviets will not be far behind.

The Air Force argued that the USSR will have to trade off nuclear-armed reentry vehicles to deploy Earth penetrator warheads on SS-18 boosters against MX in this basing mode.

"Townes gives the USSR the capability to deploy five Earth penetrator warheads on each SS-18 by 1990, and an additional five by the mid-1990s," a Defense Dept. official said.

"This could occur with greater accuracy and reduced yield required to attack capsules in MX basing arrays. The lower yield would be a Soviet tradeoff to compensate for the increased weight of an Earth penetrator warhead," he said.

USAF officers told Weinberger that closely spaced basing provides the essential element of survivability for land-based ballistic missiles against the current Soviet threat.

"The USSR can't touch it now in an attack," one of the officials said.

The Air Force agreed the USSR can respond and respond effectively, however, not until the mid-1990s. But a major point is that even if they elect to respond with options to counter the basing plan, the U.S. still would have the options to maintain its lead in strategic nuclear weaponry, the official said.